Namdhari Sikhs

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Guru Gobind Singh was not only a great soldier, the creator of the Khalsa, the mighty warriors, the lions, but He was also a great Saint and a Scholar. His Hindi Verses and many literary works give Him a high place among prose and verse writers. His courage was indomitable which He passed on to His followers for all time to come. His sacrifices were supreme. He had already lost His father. In His own words, He wedded His four sons to the bride of Death. Yet there was no tear but determination in His eyes and in His heart. He wrote to Aurangzeb: **"Of what use is it putting but a few sparks when you raise a mighty flame instead?"** He refused to co-operate with the imperialists and He wrote to Aurangzeb: **"What to say of coming to you and co-operating with you. I would not like to walk on the road on which a serpent like you walks."** The same sentiments He passed on to His disciples, including the Sant Khalsas. He wrote poems to Chandi, the Goddess of Power and Purity (Aad Shakti), and He initiated the practice of 'Devi-Puja' which was followed and continued by the Namdhari Sikhs.

The times of Maharaja Ranjit Singh and his successors witnessed many landslides on the road of religion and morality. The Brahmanic influences, costly ceremonialism, emotional depravities, individual treacheries and violence, the practice of Sati, sale of daughters, infanticide, etc., became widespread.

And, in the Panjab, as in other provinces, the fiercest challenge came from Christianity in the post-annexation period. New churches were being built in the land of the Gurus. The jail

gates were being opened to the 'Padris' to convert the convicts. Promotions were being offered to those who embraced Christianity. Even the young Prince Maharaja Dalip Singh was made to embrace the new faith. Social laws of prosperity were being altered for the progress of an alien church. The sanctity of HariMandir was endangered. Beef was being hawked about in the holy city of Amritsar under the laws of the Christian Government.

It was in the above circumstances that The Namdhari or Sant-Khalsa Panth was initiated in order to dispel darkness, to denounce social weaknesses, to meet the challenge of an overpowering Western Imperialism, and to forge the bonds of religious purity and brotherhood.

In fact, a direct parallel is available in the circumstances of Guru Gobind Singh and the rise of the Sant-Khasla. Aurangzeb wanted to destroy the Hindu and Sikh faith and he aspired to subjugate all. Therefore, the Tenth Guru created the Khalsa as a sword in the hand of the Motherland. He reminded the Sikhs of their divine mission of warring incessantly for the extirpation of oppression. He declared: "To be a Khalsa is to be a Lion; is to tolerate no oppression; is to be a life-long warrior in the propagation of virtue."

Guru Gobind Singh had to face a triple challenge: of the corrupt and proud priests; the haughty Mughal Emperor; and the pro-Mughal hilly Rajas. The Kukas or the Sant-Khalsas of the 19th century had likewise to face similar challenges: of the

internal evils represented by the priestly classes; the Christian imperialism; and the pro-British *cis*-Sutlej chieftains.

Impelled by similar circumstances, Guru Ram Singh entered upon a similar resolve of religious purity and political freedom through the pathways of perpetual sacrifice and self-denial. Nearly one month before the outbreak of the rebellion of 1857, Guru Ram Singh raised a new flag to be upheld, uttered a new pledge to be fulfilled and saw a new vision to be realized.

The Kuka or Namdhari Movement stood for religious revival at a time when Christianity was making serious inroads in the land. It represented social reforms, clean living, honest earning, equality and simplicity, when people in the Panjab had almost forgotten the message of Guru Nanak and Guru Gobind Singh. It offered nothing but non-co-operation to the Government when many of the Sikh chieftains had become the helpless victims of lust and greed by attracting the favors of the foreign masters through their debasing loyalty. It preached and practised Swadeshi when cotton duties in India were being abolished, and the markets of India were being flooded with goods of Lancashire and Manchester, besides the salt from Liverpool. It advocated protection of cows at a time when the British Government was establishing butcher-houses to flatter the Muslims as a part of their 'divide and rule' game.

The Namdhari Sikhs avoided traveling by trains. They did not walk on the highways maintained by the authorities such as the Grand Trunk Road. They established their own postal system. Their confidential letters were circulated much in the

same fashion as the fiery cross was carried through by a Highland Clan in Scottish bygone days. They never enlisted themselves for Government service. They never accepted donations from the authorities. They had their distinctive head-gear and the white dress as a symbol of their purity, and as a sign of their abiding link with the ancient heritage of their country. In their manners they were polite and cultured. Their hospitality was proverbial.

In all possible ways they suffered; in all possible ways they strove and sacrificed so that the nation might be free, and the purity of religion might be established. They created powerful contacts with the Rajas of Kashmir and Nepal to enlist their support for the noble cause. They sent their emissaries to Russia during the Second Afghan War, and thus became the forerunners of many other patriots, namely, Rash Bihari Ghose and Subhash Chandra Bose, who likewise sought foreign support for the emancipation of the Motherland. The names of Kuka and Russian agents who were involved in such contacts are available in the Foreign-Political-Secret files of the Government of India, and make an interesting, absorbing reading. By the year 1883, the Kukas and the Russians had fixed between them the 'Pass-Word', 'Red' and 'White'.

Such were the potentialities of the Kuka Movement which the British had to deal with in the second half of the 19th century. They had taken notice of this movement in the year 1863, and had been compelled to impose many restrictions. In spite of these precautions, the movement gathered momentum, and the followers of Guru Ram Singh went on

multiplying. The first serious warning was conveyed to the Government of the Panjab in September 1866 when Col. R.G. Taylor, Commissioner of Ambala wrote: "It is my thorough belief that these lads (Kookas) mean war sooner or later."

Upon this, the first intimation of the Kuka "sect" was sent to the London authorities on 8th October, 1866, by the Government of India.

Two years afterwards (in 1868), an Englishman by the name of Mr. Donovan warned Governor-General Lawrence of the coming storm. He wrote: "The plant is yet tender and can be bent at pleasure; hereafter it will not yield," It is interesting to know that the Commissioner of Ambala as well as the above Englishman both warned the Government that: "Guru Gobind raised men and money in precisely the same manner."

After this the British Government was always vigilant. Its secret agents were actively in pursuit of 'Spirits Rebellious.' The Namdhari Sikhs, on their part, were all too ready as well. Whenever the Goddess of Liberty demanded its price and quivered its thirsty lips, Guru Ram Singh and His followers offered cupfuls of blood. They were treated by the Government like criminal tribes; they were blown off with guns; they were exiled by the foreigners and defamed by many of their own kinsmen; they were deprived of their prosperities and ploughs.

Yet they survived. With confidence and courage, they wrote a story that can never grow old. With the dew-drops of self-sacrifice, they put an indelible mark on the pages of our

history. In their glorious struggle patriotic India led by Mahatma Gandhi, found its greatest weapons, namely Swadeshi and non-co-operation for a crusade against foreign rule.

Such a powerful movement deserved better notice from the scholars and writers of Indian History. But, perhaps, the difficulties were obvious. Firstly, the control of Sikh affairs and Sikh history, ever since the days of this movement, have been in such hands who could never be reconciled to the cause represented by this movement. Most of them were the "faithfuls" who gloried in the name of Great Britain. Secondly, much of the history and facts of this movement lay buried in the secret files of the Home Department of India. It was impossible to consult these files so long as the British rule survived. After 1947, the scholarly and sustained effort that was needed to unearth this new wealth was not forthcoming except in driblets. Thirdly, the Namdhari Sikhs themselves were too modest and cultured not to crave any credit and limelight. They shunned English education, as well as researches in their own past through the medium of foreign education. Some valuable efforts in this direction were, however, made by writers like Sant Nidhan Singh Alam, Sant Inder Singh Chakrawarti and Sardar Nahar Singh, M.A.

Guru Ram Singh, like Guru Gobind Singh, had purified the ranks of the Sikhs and had given them a new moral outlook as well as a new character. Thereby, He had produced fine material and a strong patriotic element for His cause. He understood that the battle of freedom, which was no less a part of His religion, could hardly be won without a social and moral

purge. This is why He began by preaching truth and righteousness.

Guru Ram Singh had also seen how degraded persons could lead to the dissolutions of a sovereign State. He had closely studied how sinful and dangerous was all contact with the foreign masters, as it had taught treason and treachery to fallen souls like Tej Singh and Lal Singh. This is why, side by side with moral and social teachings, He was anxious to draw His disciples away from the pernicious influence of the imperialists, so that treacheries may no more vitiate His ranks.

With such a deep and perfect understanding of the pitfalls and dangers before Him, He unfurled His triangular white flag at Sri Bhaini Sahib on 14th April 1857. In this way He launched a new ship on a new voyage, revived the message of Guru Gobind Singh, and to break the slumber of the innocent masses for a glorious crusade. On one hand, He gave to His disciples the original teachings and mission of Guru Gobind Singh, and on the other, He decided to introduce Swadeshi and non-co-operation against the British. This was His two-pronged attack for the resurrection of a fallen nation, so that the flag may once again fly in the four winds as a symbol of liberty and religion. He declared His fine principles and glorious aim in a special gathering of toiling peasants, field laborers, illiterate carpenters and village artisans, who formed the real backbone of the Indian masses. They were not wealthy disciples; but in sincerity and faithfulness their richness was supreme.

When the rebellion of 1857 broke out, Panjab was deeply affected. A large number of soldiers raised the cry of freedom and a big mass of people felt equally discontented against the British rule. About the part of the Panjab in this rebellion, a wrong impression has been created by certain writers for whom it is difficult to draw a line between History and Journalism, or even between history and fiction. They have also been misled to refer to the existence of Sikh-Poorbiya feeling to describe the events of this upheaval in the Panjab. When the actual story is unfolded it would be seen that Panjab, along with other provinces, did exist on the map of India in our first struggle to break the chains of British Imperialism. However, all those elements which were supreme in helping the British from 1845-49 for destroying the independence of the sovereign state of the deceased Maharaja Ranjit Singh, once again combined to help the English in the crisis of 1857. Only that saved the imperial barge.

But the ranks of the Namdharis swelled as a result of this rebellion. Many mutinous Sikh sepoys became Kukas. One of Guru Ram Singh's most important Subas, namely Brahma Singh, was a mutinous sepoy of 1857.

For about 5 years, Guru Ram Singh went on preaching His great gospel amongst the villagers, and at religious centers. He gathered a large number of disciples. In the year 1863, he had more than 40,000 disciples, whose unity, oneness of purpose, love of the Guru and moral tone were so pronounced that the English felt shaken. They employed their secret agents in order to find out the real character of this movement.

One such agent was Munee Ram Brahmin of Jullundur who reported to the Government: **"Ram Singh is gifted with magic power, which sends people into fits.... In common with all other Sikhs, doubtless, Ram Singh wishes their rule back but He does not preach this; considers himself unquestionably a Prophet and believes His preaching to be entirely of a religious nature."**

Capt. Menzies reported that the Kuka disciples "are orderly, obedient; they live frugally, and act up to the tenets of their faith."

From the reports it seems that the Government was absolutely uncertain about the character of this movement in the year 1863. But it had become conscious of the rising storm. It was trying to assess the power and strength of this movement. It had set its secret machinery into action and imposed restrictions on the movements of Guru Ram Singh. From 1863-66, Guru Ram Singh was placed under many restrictions.

Guru Ram Singh did not stop His work. Between the years 1862-67, He visited a large number of villages in the Duab areas, went to Amritsar at least thrice on the occasions of Baisakhi and Deepawali, and also attended the sacred places at Anandpur and Keshgarh. The British officers and Commissioners dogged His steps and interviewed Him from time to time. They even tried to enlist the support of His disciples for their cause but the Guru declined to promise such a support. At times, the Guru visited Amritsar and Anandpur, in spite of the restrictions imposed by the British. In the year 1866,

some of the restrictions were removed, not because the authorities were assured of the harmlessness of Guru Ram Singh and His disciples, but because they wanted to probe Him more thoroughly. The Deputy Commissioner of Ambala and the authorities at Amritsar and Ludhiana became more vigilant and they submitted their views and reports to the Government offering careful observations.

According to letters exchanged between R.G. Taylor, Commissioner and Superintendent of Ambala, and the secretary of State, it is revealed that by the year 1866 the Kuka movement had assumed a wider political importance in the eyes of the Imperialists. After this, the Government of India and the State Government in the Panjab kept a vigilant eye on the activities of the Kukas. In the year 1867, the Government learnt many more things about the Kukas. One such important information revealed to the authorities the nature of the postal system of the Kukas. The government of the Panjab reported to the Government of India in their letter No. 157-54 dated 2nd February, 1867, the following details of the Kuka Postal System: **"The 'Kookas', or as they are sometimes called the 'Sant Khalsas', have a private post of their own which appears to be admirably organized. Confidential letters are circulated much in the same way as the fiery cross was carried through by a highland clan in the Scottish bygone days. a Kooka, on the arrival at his village of another of the same sect with a dispatch, at once leaves off whatever work he may be engaged upon: if in the midst of a repast, not another morsel is eaten; he asks no question, but taking the message starts off at a run and conveys it to the next relief, or to his**

destination. Important communications are sent verbally and are not committed to writing. In carrying messages, they are said by Major Perkins, to make great detours, to avoid the Grand Trunk Road. There can be little doubt that though this machinery has been introduced to work a religious reform, yet in the hands of designing and unscrupulous men it can easily be made an engine of political power. Reports have reached Major Perkins that the Kookas openly talk of being masters of the country at some time when all the land will profess the new faith."

The above dak system was greatly instrumental in creating a sense of seriousness and importance about the mission of Guru Ram Singh among His disciples. It produced secrecy and confidence in their ranks. It saved them from the secret agents commissioned by the English as well as from the postal censor of the authorities. It also underlined their great discipline as well as their faith in the significance of their mission. The system was also a measure of economy. It embodied their ideas of a boycott.

In March 1867, Guru Ram Singh decided to make a visit to the Anandpur fair in Hoshiarpur along with a large number of His followers. This visit also opened the eyes of the authorities in respect of the strength and following of the Guru. Col. McAndre, Deputy Inspector-General of Police along with Sardar Attar Singh, reported the following details about the visit to the place where Guru Ram Singh camped: "He was sitting amongst His followers under a huge tent. About 5,000 people were sitting around Him and a number of disciples seemed to be coming and

going. There was no noise or disturbance in the camp and everybody was sitting quietly. All the men and women seemed to be in good and clean dresses. I did not observe any of the men in a state of agitation. Guru Ram Singh received me cordially."

On this occasion, the Deputy Commissioner of Hoshiarpur had deputed Fazl Hussain, Inspector of Police, to keep a watch on the situation and to make a detailed report of the activities of the Kukas. Fazl Hussain reported in the following manner: "After a personal interview with Ram Singh, I am of the opinion that He in no way acts in opposition to the British Government.... Ram Singh bathes Himself thrice daily, and at about 2 o'clock every morning takes to reading the Granth which He understands perfectly. He abhors everything wicked.... Ram Singh gives food, clothing and shelter, to the poor. A large number of followers of the other faith are embracing Kookaism. In two days in the Anandpur fair he converted 50 followers.... His followers believe that Guru Ram Singh is the Incarnation from God.... Ram Singh had 40 horses for Himself and His Subas and drums were beaten in His procession and the flags were hoisted.

Fazl Hussain again wrote: "I asked again and again about the birth-place of many of His followers but I failed to get this information. Every Kooka gave me the same answer that they had completely forgotten their original villages and now their only village was Bhainee Sahib and their only father was Satguru Ram Singh."

Fazl Hussain also referred to the controversy that took place between the Nihang Sikhs and Guru Ram Singh on this

occasion. The other Sikhs reportedly raised the following objections:

"That He sets Himself a God.

ii) That when making a convert, He does not give him Amrit to drink, as is the custom, but He whispers a Mantra in his ear.

iii) That when He makes a convert, He says to him: 'Janam Guru Hazro, Urbashee Guru Bhainee', whereas the other Sikhs say 'Janam Guru Patna, Urbashee Anandpur.'

iv) That whereas the other Sikhs entering a place of worship do not untie their hair, or remove their turbans, Kookas do.

v) That Kookas in exciting themselves to such a degree to be at times insensible, act like Mohammedan Faqirs and cannot be Guru Sikhs."

It is interesting to note that there was no mention at all made by those who opposed the Guru about the Granth Sahib being a Guru at that time. Nevertheless, to all the above charges Guru Ram Singh replied back as reported by Fazl Hussain in the following lines: **"To this Ram Singh replied that, if they really acted up to the Sikh religion, they would appreciate His doctrine; that they act quite contrary to the 'Granth' by eating meat, drinking, lying, licentiousness, female infanticide etc., and that therefore Kookas do not consider them Sikhs."**

It was also during this period that many of the Kukas were found digging up graves and other places of superstition. Kuka Dewar Singh was convicted and sentenced to two years' rigorous imprisonment. The Deputy Inspector of Police at Dehlom reported that 27 graves had been destroyed at a village named Khuttree Koseh. Four accused were punished with six months' rigorous imprisonment, besides fines. The destruction of Peer Khana and Muree was also reported at Khanna. The punishment was again six months' imprisonment and a fine of Rs 10. Similar reports also poured in from Amritsar, Jullundur, Gurdaspur, Gujranwala, Sialkot.

The above reports clearly show that the Namdhari Sikhs were keen to finish all superstition in the land of the five rivers, and for this purpose they were sometimes prepared to take even the law in their own hands.

As it is clear, the history of the Namdhari Sikhs' religious and political achievements and significance is impossible to be told in brief paragraphs. Yet to clear away the many misconceptions about the Sant Khalsas, the above fraction of history has been mentioned so that the reader may use it as a guideline to assess the material they may have, or will in the future, read about the Namdhari Movement.

It would not be out of place to also state here that the Namdhari movement is not essentially 'new'. The concept of 'Naam' or 'Gurmantra' has been the very essence of the teachings of all Gurus. The reason why the name Namdhari was used for the disciples of Guru Ram Singh, even though His

movement's original name was 'Sant Khalsa', was due to the sad fact that all other Sikh factions had given up the 'Naam' and 'Bani' (Scriptures) that formed an essential part of Sikhism. The Namdhari Movement can hence be rightly viewed as a revival movement founded for no other purpose than to restore the position of a fallen religion. Scholars such as Giani Gian Singh and the former head-Granthi of Harimandir Sahib, Sardar Kartar Singh Kalaswalia, also see similarly **that if it wasn't for the Namdhari Movement initiated by Guru Ram Singh, Sikhism would have had a very different present and it may have indeed been wiped out by the Christian missionaries and the corruptions within.**

For more information on the Namdhari Sikhs please follow these links:

- The Gurus of the Namdhari Sikhs
- Truth behind the perceived 'death' of Guru Gobind Singh in 1708 A.D.
- Small Introduction about Namdhari Sikhs
- The History of the Namdhari Sikhs - by Giani Gian Singh Ji
- Namdhari Singhs and Dharma

New! - Kuka Bara Mah Screen Saver - Learn the Namdhari History while watching beautiful scenery with this screen saver featuring the translation of the Baramah written by Kavi Chanda Singh.